Curtis Wayne Sadd

"He is getting the recognition he deserved for giving his life for our country."
-Don Rekdahl

In Recognition and Remembrance

PHOTO BY HEATHER KIBBEE

PHOTO COURTESY OF DON REKDAHL

Above: Jim Nott (left), Don Rekdahl and Robert Peake visit the Clark County War Memorial in Vancouver before Sadd's name was inscribed.
Left: Curtis Wayne Sadd in a photo taken shortly before his death in 1945 aboard the USS Saratoga.

❑ A Camas man spends five years working to honor his fallen friend

By Heather Kibbee
Post-Record Staff

It was the day after Christmas in 1941 that Curtis Wayne Sadd left the only home he had known, boarded the USS Enterprise, and headed for the restless war-torn waters of the Pacific Ocean.

Just 17 years old at the time, it had been a challenge for Sadd to convince his divorced parents, Nellie and Oscar, to let him go into the military at all. His father denied all requests to sign a waiver, necessary for an underage boy to join the Navy. But instead of giving up, he traveled to Seattle to convince his mother, who after much persuading, gave Sadd the signature he needed to head out to the unknown.

Local resident Don Rekdahl grew up with Sadd in Camas, and remembers that trip with his close friend.

"I was with him that day, we were just in Seattle for one day to get the signature," Rekdahl, now 74, remembered.

The two, along with another boy, Jim Nott, had been friends since the tender age of six.

Nott, who still lives in Camas, recalls those years before the war with fondness and humor.

"My mother would take us to school, and when the recess bell rang, we went to eat lunch, and when the lunch bell rang...we would go home," Nott said, a broad smile appearing across his face.

And the biggest accomplishment of their youth — "staying out of jail."

It was that indestructible feeling of youth that lead many teenagers of that era to join the military and serve their country.

"The bombing of Pearl Harbor had just happened, and at that time there were a lot of people who left high school to go into the service," Rekdahl explained. "We were being attacked by another country. All of the youth said, 'let's get in there and win the war.'"

Because he was drafted in the Army, Nott, who was subsequently injured during the Battle of the Bulge, did not see his friend once he left for the Navy that December. But Sadd and Rekdahl, also a Navy man, were able to keep in touch.

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It was in the summer of 1943 that the Enterprise returned to dock in San Francisco and Sadd was being assigned to a new ship, the U.S.S Saratoga. Rekdahl was in boot camp there, so the two buddies met up for a "liberty," where, according to Rekdahl, they "raised the devil."

"I was in boot camp, and he knew I was in the area so he came over and saw me—we were able to get one liberty together," he said.

Little did Rekdahl know what that one day of shared freedom would mean.

"Curt left shortly after that and that was the last time I saw him," Rekdahl said.

Son and friend, Curtis Wayne Sadd was killed Feb. 21, 1945, when a "kamikaze" Japanese plane dove onto the Saratoga's deck, hitting the gun he was stationed on.

All that remained was his watch.

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After receiving the news of Sadd's death from family, Rekdahl finished his own service in World War II, married and had a family, but his fallen friend was never far from his thoughts. But it was not until more than 50 years later, in 1995, that Sadd once again, entered his life—and of all places, while dropping off his taxes at the Clark County Courthouse in Vancouver.

Passing by the war memorial that sat in front of the courthouse, Rekdahl decided to stop and look for his old friend's name.

"His name wasn't on there," Rekdahl, 74, explained. "That is when I started asking questions."

Those questions led him to Robert Peake, post commander of the Camas-Washougal Veterans of Foreign Wars Post.

Because war records often list a person's hometown as the city of enlistment, Rekdahl discovered that it was that quick trip up to Seattle in 1941 that was the primary cause of all of the confusion.

Peake steered Rekdahl in the right direction, which meant documenting Sadd's life from his birth to his death.

"Bob [Peake] told me what I needed to figure out, and I gathered the information," he said.

Rekdahl wrote letters, made phone calls, and wrote more letters, until he was finally able to gather Sadd's birth certificate, Camas High School records, and the DD-214, a record of all aspects of an individual's military service.

"It took quite a while to gather all of this information. The Navy does not like to give out records to people who are not family," he said.

It was about this time that preparations for a new memorial, to be built at the Vancouver Barracks, was taking place. The new memorial would replace the one in front of the courthouse which was discovered to be missing several names.

Rekdahl submitted his information to the Clark County Veterans War Memorial Committee and was told Sadd's name would appear on the new memorial, due to be completed in November 1998.

Then, this past April, Rekdahl was again at the county courthouse dropping off his tax forms when he discovered that his friends name was still missing.

Several more phone calls ensued, and last Wednesday, five years after Rekdahl began his quest to recognize his friend's sacrifice, Sadd's name was finally inscribed in the shiny black granite along with the 379 other men and women of Clark County who gave their lives for their country during WWI.

According to Peake, funds were made available for just this type of situation.

"We knew something like this would probably happen, when you are involved in such a large program," Peake said. "And they put some money aside in case anything like this happened. This only proves that we are only human. That some things can slide by really easy."

According to John Wulle, a member of the Clark County Veterans War Memorial Committee, and presiding judge of district court, the memorial was built to accommodatenames of others who may have been missed as well as room for wars that may happen in the future.

"We were very careful to plan it so that the monument would last well into the future," Wulle said.

Both Rekdahl and Nott said that the friend they grew up with is only getting the recognition he deserves.

"[Sadd] was someone we grew up with and shared our experiences with—that was important," Rekdahl said. "To have him taken away in the prime of his life is a terrible thing.

"I figure we owe Curtis this much."